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Latin American Catholicism, *Comprometido* and Compromised

L'auteur traite des tensions qui existent entre l'engagement (compromiso) *et le compromis dans l'histoire du catholicisme latino-américain. Lorsque l'on remonte à la conquête espagnole et aux périodes coloniale et républicaine, il est clair que le catholicisme a dû jouer des rôles contradictoires: légitimer ses relations vis-à-vis du pouvoir en place et en même temps défendre les droits des opprimés. Les tensions entre sa mission et ses compromis ont tout d'abord été visibles au moment de l'émergence d'une religion populaire syncrétique, ensuite, durant la période contemporaine, au travers de ses trois tentatives de cohabitation avec la modernité en Amérique latine: la théologie de la libération d'apparence radicale, engagée au départ vers une libération totale, mais compromise, et finalement neutralisée par ses liens avec les théologies traditionnelles; l'*Opus Dei, *mouvement occulte alliant une approche par le travail et la production qu'exige le capitalisme et un autoritarisme catholique traditionnel; enfin, les processus politiquement ambigus des conversions vers le protestantisme.*

I

A contribution to a collection of essays on the *compromis catholique* in Latin America could deal in principle with the entire history of Latin American Catholicism. This embarrassment of riches is due to the fact that in order to do justice to the claim to universality embedded in the word "Catholic" the Church has had to engage continuously in the skillful use of accommodation and force, the proportion between the two having been determined by the specific social constellation within which the Church happened to find itself. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to individual Catholics; these, like members of all religions, have had to negotiate their way between the demands of religious specialists and those of the world. These processes of accommodation are worth studying for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that since the late 15th century, the history of Latin American Christianity seems to repeat, in a condensed manner as it were, many of the processes involving force and compromise that took place first in the eastern Mediterranean world in late antiquity, then in medieval Europe, and finally during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

Before proceeding, and at the risk of stating the obvious, it is necessary to point out that, inasmuch as one can determine the boundaries of a "religious" realm, accommodation is the rule rather than the exception in the interaction between the religious and other spheres. On the other hand,

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given the peculiar characteristics of the Roman Church one cannot approach its history as one approaches that of other missionary, but generally decentralized religions, such as Buddhism and Islam. Because of its centralized and bureaucratic structure, the Roman Church was able to preserve its remarkable institutional strength, one which was able to survive first the loss of its Greek-speaking territories and then that of large portions of northern Europe; at the same time, precisely because of its centralized and relatively self-contained structure, the compromises in which the Church has engaged are far more visible than those that involved members of non-bureaucratically organized religions. This visibility, coupled with the fact that, like missionary religions in general, Christianity has emphasized its belief component, has made certain types of accommodation relatively difficult. Unlike Buddhism (which has developed a complex conceptual edifice but also a loose organization) and Islam (whose relatively simple belief system has only exceptionally been controlled in a centralized manner) Christian beliefs and practices have been propagated, administered and policed by a group of functionaries who owed unconditional allegiance to a central authority.

II

Force and compromise can be found in action during the first contact between Christians and non-Christians in the New World. Fulfilling one of the functions traditionally fulfilled by religion—that of sacralizing the identity and the activities of a group—Christianity served as one of the weapons used by the Spanish conquerors, a weapon already used with success as a motor and legitimizer of the *Reconquista*: all that Iberian *Reconquista* Christianity had to do was to drop the prefix and become *Conquista* Christianity. In this instance, there was no compromise whatsoever: Christianity would be true to its mission by incorporating, however violently, the inhabitants of the New World into a Church that in receiving them believed itself to be fulfilling its Catholicity.[1] On the other hand, there was a compromise of the evangelical ideals, insofar as the conquered status of the new Christians allowed the old ones—*cristiano viejo* (old Christian) being the term employed at the time in Spain to distinguish those who could claim *limpieza de sangre* (clean blood) from Muslim and Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants—to use them as the producers of the wealth that would allow the conquering Christians to live the life of Spanish *hidalgos*. That some Christians saw this state of affairs as having compromised Christianity is shown by the denunciations of Spanish brutalities issued, among others, by the bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de las Casas, a priest who in the second half of the 20th century would become for liberation theologians the embodiment of a "prophetic" Christianity, that is, a Christianity that instead of serving as a legitimizer of the social order acted rather as a denouncer of injustice. We shall see that the emergence of the Theology of Liberation itself is the result of a number of compromises which would eventually lead to the spiritualization and demise of this movement.

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In the 16th century, the processes of accommodation involved both the Catholic Church and the new Christians. From the point of view of the institution, the task ahead resembled very much the one faced by the bishops around the Mediterranean world during the centuries of Christian expansion. It was imperative for the administrators of triumphant Christianity to eradicate the cults around which the life of the polis, the Hellenistic, and the Roman cities had been lived,[2] while at the same time trying to harness the sacredness of shrines and offices in the service of the new religion. This process, studied most recently by Flint,[3] involved the destruction of temples and statues, but also the Christianization of the sacred places and the toleration of certain practices. To be sure, the Church's attitude changed over the centuries; thus during the early Middle Ages, due to the clergy's inability to monopolize the management of sacrality, we find a degree of tolerance towards popular practices. During the high Middle Ages and even more so during the Counter-Reformation, on the other hand, there was a concerted effort on the part of the clergy to control access to the sacred realm; this contributed to the dematerialization and spiritualization of religion, to the emphasis of the difference between sacred and profane realms, and to the further delegitimation of practices labelled as magic and superstition.[4] Analogous processes took place in the New World; here we encounter the systematic destruction of temples, images and sacred objects, accompanied by the assimilation of indigenous sources of sacrality. The reasons for these apparently contradictory approaches are easy to see. It was necessary to destroy indigenous sources of sacrality because this sacrality was inextricably linked to the political organization of the societies conquered by the Christians; on the other hand, in the process of deploying the new Christian sources of legitimation the colonial authorities could—indeed had to—make use of the already existing ideological infrastructures. Just as the Church of Santo Domingo in Cuzco was built upon the massive stone walls of the main Inca temple, so could other churches and shrines be built in a way that made use of physical structures and sites but, more important, of the sedimented rituals of the indigenous populations. The symbolic importance of these choices cannot be overestimated: besides literally showing the defeated, inferior, status of the old cults, the conquerors managed to integrate them into the new Catholic system.

In ritual terms, since, despite its increased spiritualization, late medieval and early modern western religion was still concerned with the management of physical reality—health, sex, fertility, wealth, success in war—analogous rituals of non-Christian origin could be accommodated without great difficulty. The symbolic understanding of reality typical of Catholic Christianity could absorb, when needed, rituals of non-Christian origin, as these were also based on the assumption that, because of the analogical correspondence between various levels of reality, one could act upon the physical world in a way that is usually considered as sacramental when the rituals are performed by clerics, and as magical when the rituals take place outside of clerical control.[5]

The status of supernatural beings was more problematic, as Christian monotheism made it difficult to engage in the *interpretatio Christiana* of

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indigenous divinities. Still, it was possible to achieve some kind of fusion between various forms of the Christian god and indigenous divinities. One of those cases, studied recently by Rostworowski, involves the emergence in Peru of the devotions surrounding the *Señor de los milagros* (Lord of Miracles), a dark-skinned Christ who is still the center of massive processions in Lima, and whose cult can be traced back to the shrine of the god Pachacamac, near Lima.[6] On the other hand, since despite its nominal monotheism the traditional Catholic world is populated by a multitude of supernatural beings, it was still possible to accommodate other indigenous divinities. The best-known example of both assimilation and accommodation can be found in the cult of the Nahuatl-speaking and dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe, who appeared in a place in which the Aztec goddess Tonantzin had been worshipped earlier. The emergence of this "syncretistic" quasi-divinity placed the new Christians under the all-encompassing Christian umbrella; the emergence of this divinity, while implicitly justifying the dominant position of those who had brought Christianity to Mexico, allowed the conquered to assert their non-Spanish but nevertheless Christian identity. An Andean counterpart of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the Virgin of Chuquisaca who was believed to talk to Indians but not to Spaniards. As one would expect, in many cases assimilation transformed radically the character of the indigenous divinity; thus, the dualistic Christian conception of good and evil led to the equation of some morally ambiguous indigenous supernatural beings with the Devil of Christian mythology—this happened, for example, with the Andean Supay.

The developments referred to above are generally classified as cases of "syncretism" and "popular religion". It should be kept in mind, however, that being based on the assumption that there are pure religions that for various reasons become contaminated, "syncretism" is a theologically based category of religious illegitimacy. Therefore, unless one wishes to engage in crypto-theology, and given that the term "syncretism" is not likely to be abandoned, one should regard cases of syncretism as analogous to socio-linguistic processes that involve the formation of pidgins, creoles and dialects. Not unlike these linguistic formations, cases of religious syncretism are placed at the intersection of processes of assimilation, accommodation and power. Just as creoles and dialects are linguistic formations that will be considered as languages *tout court* only when their speakers have gained a certain degree of legitimacy, formations labelled as syncretistic will be promoted to the status of "religion" for reasons that have little to do with the character of their ritual practices or of their doctrines. The religious equivalents of pidgins would be cases in which certain words, segments of rituals, random images, and liturgical vestments are adopted by members of a conquered group in order to communicate and then to survive the onslaught of the conquering group; the religious counterparts of creoles, on the other hand, would be situations in which an accommodation of sorts has been reached and new meanings have been born.[7]

Accommodation is also present in the case of conversion—conversion and syncretism being quite difficult to differentiate in many cases. It would be mistaken to consider the cases of conversion to Christianity that accom-

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panied the Iberian conquest of South America as having taken place exclusively as the result of coercion. That such coercion did occur is in no doubt; what is important, however, is the fact that for members of societies that had been conquered by powerful aliens, precisely because of the overwhelming nature of the defeat, anything that belonged to these aliens was both to be feared and to be admired. Religion was no exception: once the conquest was accomplished, Iberian Christianity was seen as being able to dispense what the old gods had not been able to deliver. Thus, already in the 1580s, that is, barely five decades after the conquest of Peru, we find Inca groups throwing in their lot with the Virgin of Copacabana. Just as the conquered adopted and made use of the horses, gunpowder and other physical weapons of the conquerors, so did they value the power of their divinities.[8]

Accommodation, therefore, was a fact of life both for conquerors and conquered, for the Church and for the new Christians. Indeed, when a political compromise with the colonial authorities could not be reached, the military actions undertaken by indigenous groups were carried out in a way that presupposed that a politico-religious accommodation had taken place: these insurrections were generally carried out under Christian banners, and in some cases in the name of the Spanish king (just as peasant rebellions in imperial Russia were fought in the name of the Czar). As Szemiński has shown, during the late 18th-century rebellion led by Tupac Amaru in the southern Andes, Indian rebels claimed that Spaniards ought to be killed not because they were Christians but because they were betraying Christianity: it was the Indians who were now the true Christians.[9]

Just as it is unjustified to draw boundaries between syncretic and non-syncretic forms of religion, one ought to be skeptical of attempts to reify "popular religion". Rather than being regarded as a clearly delimited entity, opposed to "official religion", "popular religion" should be understood as the designation of often contradictory sets of practices and beliefs, which in some cases are the result of a process of marginalization—but not necessarily of condemnation—initiated by a dominant group; in other cases, popular religion emerges as the result of a subaltern group's attempts to challenge through ritual means the symbolic apparatus of dominant groups.[10] In both cases, however, the boundaries between the popular and the official, between high and low are permeable. Their marginal and therefore dangerous status turns popular forms of religion into repositories of a power that is sought not least by elite groups; conversely, despite all the reversals and profanations, the ritual character of popular religion constitutes a bridge to the clerically dominated ritual forms of religion: one must keep in mind that the performance of rituals of reversal depends upon the knowledge of the practices and belief that are being parodied.

If syncretism and popular religion occupy the uncertain space between what is obligatory and that which is forbidden, the need to draw boundaries around a religion which itself functioned as the legitimizing boundary[11] of the Spanish state required the delimitation of categories of total illegitimacy: idolatry, witchcraft, heresy. Thus, besides engaging in compromises and adapting indigenous sources of sacrality, in order to

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defend the Christian foundations of the colonial state, Spanish clerics engaged since the early 16th century in the systematic destruction of "idols" and mummies,[12] and in the punishment of *hechiceros*: the Church's ultimate commitment to the Spanish state was never in doubt.

III

During the wars of independence, even though it was not uncommon to find priests who had taken the side of the *criollos*, the Church as institution sided with Spain, condemnations of the rebels being issued both by local bishops and by the Vatican. Thus while the Mexican rebel priest Hidalgo was excommunicated by the local bishop, successive popes, Pius VIII and Leo XII, issued encyclicals in support of Spain. After political independence was finally achieved accommodation had to take place once again; this, however, had to wait until August 1831, when in the bull *Sollicitudo Ecclesiarum* Gregory XVI declared his intention to establish relations with the new governments. But the relationship between Church and State was not always smooth: the newly independent states tried to claim for themselves the *Patronato*, that is, the control exercised earlier by Spain over ecclesiastical matters such as the nomination and appointment of bishops.[13] In any event, despite the Church having earlier taken the side of the colonial power, accommodation with the new states was always possible, as each party needed the other for its own survival.

The closeness between Church and government, whether civilian or military, continued during the 19th and early 20th centuries. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the worsening economic situation of the subcontinent and the threat to the status quo represented by the Cuban revolution gave rise to an increased polarization between leftist and rightist groups which resulted in the establishment of military dictatorships, in some cases encouraged and in all supported by the United States. Since it would be impossible to review the cases of individual Latin American countries,[14] it is enough to say that we find a range of attitudes towards torture, murder and disappearance: from the case of Brazil, where many members of the hierarchy eventually denounced the brutalities of the regime in power,[15] to that of Argentina, where the Church bestowed its blessings upon the dictators, and even consecrated the entire country to the Virgen de Luján during the Onganía dictatorship.[16] Generally speaking, compromise was the preferred option; that was clearly the case in Chile, where the Church openly welcomed the 1973 coup against Allende's socialist government, while mildly protesting the military's crimes. These protests, grandly labelled as "prophetic" by members of the Church (and by generous historians such as Smith), generally took place when the Church was directly threatened.[17] In an article written in 1983 (but published only in 1987), this writer said that at a time of high inflation, 30 percent unemployment, and loss of middle-class support, the Church was likely to "throw its weight behind the dissenting groups once the position of the Pinochet dictatorship becomes intolerable".[18] The above statement did not require

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excessive perspicacity: like the Christian Democrats, the Chilean Church did support the reestablishment of a democracy whose destruction they had welcomed in 1973.

IV

In 1971, two years before the coup against Allende's government and three years after the establishment of a reformist military government in Peru, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a diocesan priest, professor of theology at the Pontifical Catholic University in Lima, published his *Teología de la liberación*,[19] surely the most influential theological work ever written by a Latin American. What was welcome to some and anathema to others was that, besides the expected passages of the Bible and the quotations of recent theological literature, one finds in Gutiérrez's book numerous references to works of economists and sociologists, especially those associated with dependency theory. Given the abundance of literature on the Theology of Liberation, and on the main liberation theologians, it will not be necessary to discuss the main tenets of this theological movement. It is enough to say that in rejecting the conception of "two histories", one sacred and one profane, and postulating the existence of only one salvific history that does not distinguish between spiritual and material liberation, Gutiérrez seemed to be rejecting the series of compromises which eventually allowed the Church to accommodate itself to every conceivable social arrangement, beginning with those prevalent during the late Empire.

It would seem, then, that insofar as Gutiérrez and other theologians, *qua* theologians, were engaged in the development of a theology committed to integral salvation, they were not engaging in any kind of compromise. To be sure, conservative Christians argued that, on the contrary, the liberation theologians' use of the vocabulary of the social sciences and of Marxism compromised the integrity of theology itself. But as subsequent events show, despite the theologians' commitment to social justice, the theological baggage, the reliance on typically theological ways of thinking, compromised the "liberation", that is, the political component of this theology. It is not simply that, acting as obedient priests, Gutiérrez and Boff submitted to disciplinary measures taken by the Vatican, or that in books such as *Beber en su propio pozo*,[20] published 12 years after *Teología de la liberación*—long after the reformist faction of the Peruvian military had lost power—Gutiérrez's earlier references to dependency theory are replaced by the most traditional "spirituality" imaginable; rather, it is the case that the very use of theological vocabulary, categories and ways of thinking paved the way for subsequent developments. If one compares passages in the 1971 book with those found in *Beber en su propio pozo*, one might think that the references to the "challenges to spirituality" ("desafíos a la espiritualidad") and to the need to place the defense of human rights and the struggle for justice "in a wider and deeper problematic" ("una problemática más ancha y profunda"),[21] imply an unconditional surrender to the hierarchy; similarly, one might be tempted to believe that when Gutiérrez writes that "It is a

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grave historical error to reduce what is taking place among us [Latin Americans] to a social or political problem,"[22] he is turning the politically threatening statements he made in 1971 into bland theological commonplaces; finally, if one were to compare the Conclusion of the 1971 book with that of its 1983 counterpart, one might be tempted to contrast the defiant appearance of the word *compromiso* (commitment) in the very first line of the Conclusion of the 1971 book,[23] with the references found in *Beber en su propio pozo*—at once apocalyptic and passive—to "a kairós, a propitious time", a moment in which "the Lord knocks at the door of the ecclesial community that lives in the subcontinent" in order to have dinner with them.[24] But, even though the changes in emphasis are undeniable, these could take place because of the peculiarities of theological discourse. As argued in an article published in 1985 (which did not take into account the 1983 book), the fact that the Theology of Liberation is indeed a theology guarantees that without much effort the most radical statements can be transformed into vague spiritual exhortations that no one would find objectionable.[25] It could be said that the struggle between "liberation" and "theology"—which conservatives feared would end with the betrayal of theology—ended with the spiritualization of liberation, and thus with the demise of Liberation Theology: indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the fate of Liberation Theology was already sealed at the moment of its conception, more than a quarter of a century ago.

Among the components of the theology elaborated by Gutiérrez, none is more liable to unlimited ideological manipulation as his understanding of the gratuitousness of the Christian divinity's love for the poor. According to Gutiérrez, "A God who loves the poor because the poor deserve it, is a perfectly comprehensible God. However, to accept that God loves the poor simply because they are in a situation of oppression and exploitation, shocks us, and reveals to us the absolute gratuitousness of God's love, beyond any anthropomorphism."[26] There are several aspects of this statement that are worth discussing. One of them is the fact that, like many religious reformers, Gutiérrez is suspicious of divine anthropomorphism;[27] however, not being able to solve the contradiction inherent in wanting to preserve the notion of love, while at the same time seeking to avoid the notion of a loving subject who cannot but be understood in anthropomorphic terms, he takes refuge in the notion of a god who is beyond comprehension. The unstable logical status of the notion of divine incomprehensibility, fascinating as it is from a philosophical or "mystical" perspective, is, however, exceedingly dangerous from a political one. To give just one example: the irrationality of the "numinous", a term coined by Rudolf Otto in *Das Heilige*, is, according to the Marburg theologian, the result of the separation of the "sacred" (*das Heilige*) from the realm of the moral (*das Sittliche*).[28] Despite the half century that separates the theologians, there is but one step from Gutiérrez's conception of a moral—but incomprehensible—god who loves regardless of the moral qualities of the objects of his love to a god whose numinous—and incomprehensible—nature is the result of his being beyond morality. As argued in an earlier publication, there is nothing in this kind of discourse that would prevent a member of a conservative group such as the

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Opus Dei from claiming that, for reasons incomprehensible to mere humans, the chosen beneficiaries of God's love are the rich.[29] Given that, under ideal circumstances, political action should be based on choices involving both rationality and morality, it is clear that Gutiérrez's theological decisionism cannot serve as the basis for a political or even for an ethical program.

From a long-term historical perspective, the theological assimilation of sociological and especially of Marxist vocabulary found in Latin American Liberation Theology can be considered as analogous to the changes in the Church's attitude towards the economic sphere that took place during the high Middle Ages. Just as in the 12th and 13th centuries changes in the economic structure of Europe led to the modification of theologians' stance towards money lending, work and the economic sphere in general,[30] political and economic changes in the second half of the 20th century can be understood as having caused a number of Latin American clerics to do what one would expect theologians to do, namely, to theologize one of the ideologies that seemed to represent the future of the subcontinent, thus preparing a place for Christianity—and therefore for the Church—in the societies that would be ruled by revolutionary regimes. This theological accommodation is not to be understood as a conscious undertaking, and even less as conspiracy; despite the subsequent—and unavoidable—retreats into traditional *espiritualidad*, one cannot question the liberation theologians' initial commitment to an integral liberation.

V

More important than the philosophical and political implications of doctrines based on divine incomprehensibility, or than their predictable reliance on a closed corpus of scriptures which they subject to a "prophetic" reading, is the liberation theologians' assumption that Latin America will remain Catholic. As the Theology of Liberation was spreading through Latin America, causing the controversies, condemnations and ultimate spiritualization to which we have referred, a potentially more important religious development was taking place across the subcontinent, namely the spread of Protestantism.[31] While academic and religious publishers, particularly in the United States, were busily issuing translations of the main liberation theologians, a potentially more significant religious development was almost ignored. Indeed, while Gutiérrez, now politically insignificant and entirely spiritualized, received countless academic honors, and became a subject of learned studies that seemed to assume that Liberation Theology and Latin American religion were synonymous, the very foundation of his theological enterprise was being questioned. For now, in effect, it was no longer a matter of Catholics rejecting a "two histories" view of liberation; now it was a situation in which Catholicism itself was being abandoned.

If the Liberation Theology was the result of a peculiar, but by no means unique, incarnation of the Catholic compromise, the current religious situation could be seen as involving a radical commitment to the new ways

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of life demanded by capitalism. In effect, the abandonment of Catholicism has involved in many cases the adoption of the disciplined, instrumental approach to reality and risk-taking that began in 17th and 18th-century Europe.[32] This can be seen, for example, in the improvement in economic status found among Guatemalan weavers who have converted to Protestantism. As Annis writes, "by and large, Protestants do seem better geared and far more motivated than Catholics to pursue lifestyles that will either lift them out of poverty or protect hard-won financial gains."[33] The attitude towards work found among these weavers can be contrasted with that prevalent in peasant communities in which ritual redistribution of wealth still plays an important role.[34] On the other hand, as Stoll and others have shown, there is no necessary correlation between conversion to Protestantism and improvement in one's economic situation. Given the contradictory nature of the results of abandoning Catholicism, it may be necessary to place the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism in a large historical perspective. Indeed, considering the role of England in the industrial revolution and in the expansion of capitalism, as well as the presence of Iberian institutions in Latin America for half a millennium, it is difficult to reject Martin's view of the current confrontation between Hispanic Catholicism and Anglo Protestantism as an example of the confrontation between English and Hispanic ideologies. At the same time, as demonstrated by the existence of a flourishing pre-Reformation capitalism not just in Flemish and Hanseatic towns, but also in regions that would remain Catholic after the Reformation—south German, Rhenish and northern Italian cities—it is important to keep in mind that, among other factors, the hegemonic or non-hegemonic position of a religion in a given society is perhaps more important than the doctrinal content of that religion.[35] This would mean that it has been the dominant position of the Church, more so than the ritual and doctrinal peculiarities of Catholicism that have blocked the emergence of the social spaces within which modernity could have emerged. The combination of weak, predatory states, inept ruling classes, an hegemonic institution that managed to absorb and thus to neutralize every conceivable situation and ideology (including Marxism, thanks to Liberation Theology), and the dominance of the United States, did not permit the emergence of the confrontations that characterize a true civil society.

The question now is whether the Church will be able to neutralize or assimilate Protestantism. What is likely is that, with Liberation Theology exiled to the safety of the universities and publishing houses of the United States, the Church will undertake a new Counter-Reformation, attempting to incorporate as many of the characteristics of evangelical Christianity as possible. The 16th-century Counter-Reformation can be understood as the sustained attempt to subject to a centralized control religious practices and beliefs in the lands not lost to Protestantism. The rationalization of the religious sphere involved, besides the policing of religious practices, a Protestant-like focus on the psychological aspects of individuals' religious lives, including the minute self-examination best exemplified by Loyola's Spiritual Exercises. Are we witnessing now a renewed Counter-Reformation/Protestantization of Catholicism, carried out once again with

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the blessings of the Vatican? The current prominence of the *Opus Dei* in Latin America, made possible in part by the single-minded support of John Paul II, could be understood as being part of a two-pronged strategy. One is obviously related to the need to counteract the Liberation Theology; the other could perhaps be understood as a belated attempt to do through the *Opus Dei* what the Church had achieved with the Company of Jesus during the Counter-Reformation. Because of their discipline and their inner-worldly activism (which Trevor-Roper has compared to the Calvinist attitude towards work[36]), the Jesuits could be entrusted to carry out the task of spreading the Counter-Reformation in a world that increasingly required rational management; on the other hand, because of their economic modernity and their proclivity to accommodate non-Christian representations, the order was mistrusted by conservative Catholics.[37] After the ideological reliability of the order was compromised in the 20th century as a result, among other things, of the number of Jesuits who became involved with radical political causes, the Vatican needed a new, dependable, instrument. This was essential not just to carry out the policies of the Church, an organization that does not tolerate internal dissent, but above all to allow the Church to accommodate itself to the requirements of a world in which capitalism seems to reign supreme. It is true that this new compromise between Church and *saeculum* is accompanied by constant papal warnings about the dangers inherent in an economy ruled by the free market; but such castigations arise also—although less frequently of late—from other institutions, universities, for example, that are firmly dependent upon capitalism. Ultimately, just as Liberation Theology can be seen as the (in the event unnecessary) attempt to prepare the ground for a possible accommodation between Catholicism and a subcontinent ruled by revolutionary regimes, papal support for a group that seems to represent a new version of inner-worldly asceticism can be regarded as the ultimate compromise with the ideology that, until environmental degradation puts an end to an otherwise dangerously unbalanced economic growth, will be regarded as the ideology to end all ideologies. In any event, if the Protestantization of Catholicism is to be accomplished, besides the simplification of the liturgy, the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the Mass, the abandonment of priestly clothing in non-ritual contexts, the decoration of churches and the like, the final surrender to triumphant capitalism requires the rejection of anything that may appear as economically wasteful, and therefore the embrace of an attitude towards the world that values discipline and above all productivity.

All of these qualities are demanded from the *Opus Dei* members: a positive attitude towards work, voluntarism (which an ex-Jesuit has likened to the Pelagian "heresy"[38]), the cultivation of a discipline that can easily turn into asceticism, the quest for knowledge, the pursuit of (sometimes shady) business, and the rejection of waste: according to one of Escrivá's "Maxims" (463), "Charity does not consist so much in 'giving' as in 'understanding.' "; similarly, Maxim 979 recommends the "apostolate of not giving".[39] Since we have been discussing processes of accommodation, it is necessary to remember that the *Opus*' modernizing tendencies coexist with

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old-fashioned habits, only part of which can be attributed to the peculiarities of this organization's founder, the fatuous Monsignor Josemaría (sic) Escrivá de Balaguer y Albas, Marquis of Peralta: while the pursuit of efficiency and profit would seem to correspond to the ideology unfairly identified exclusively with northern Europe, the hierarchical organization, the passion for secrecy, the cult of elegance, can be regarded as being rooted in the purest Catholic, but also in the old Spanish, or, even more, Mediterranean soil. Finally, it might be worth asking whether the antipathy that the founder of the *Opus Dei* felt towards the Jesuits was the hostility one feels against competitors or that felt against those who were not able to fulfill the duty one is now fulfilling.

The question now is whether an institution that sees itself as a link between the natural and the supernatural realms will be able to hold to a position whose ultimate source of legitimacy is this organization's claim to be a dispenser of sacramental grace, while at the same time trying to accommodate itself to a world in which the very idea of grace may no longer play a significant role. To be sure, it would be a mistake to believe that the Catholic Church has not faced similar problems since the days of Constantine. Accommodation has indeed taken place many times; it is enough to remember the Church's ability to come to terms—sometimes reluctantly, sometimes eagerly—with the Roman bureaucracy, the Germanic invaders, the emerging states, the remonetarization of the economy during the high Middle Ages, Europe's colonial expansion, the scientific revolution, the emergence of capitalism, republicanism and, most recently, fascism. But the current situation seems to be particularly grave: for the second time in its history Christendom appears to be unable to hold on to the territories in which it once flourished. The difference is that while the southern shore of the Mediterranean was lost militarily to Christendom's great adversary, Islam, the inhabitants of the most prosperous parts of the northern shore appear to be moving away, step by step, and quite peacefully, from a bureaucratically administered sacrality.[40] Leaving aside the controversies about secularization, public v. private religion, and implicit religion, it may be enough to point out that, aware of these trends, Rome has renewed its efforts in Latin America and in sub-Saharan Africa. However, given the concern with economic development prevalent in these regions, as well as the competition of Protestant Christianity in the former and of Islam in the latter, the Church cannot afford to be seen as interfering, ritually or ideologically, with the ways of life necessary for economic growth. Therefore, rather than trying to preserve the old rituals characteristic of Latin Christianity—rituals whose abandonment appears to have improved the economic position of at least some Latin American converts to Protestantism—the Church at its highest levels may want to promote versions of Catholicism that, without questioning in any way the institution's authoritarian reflexes, could function in a world ruled by capitalism. Four centuries ago, that was the task of the Company of Jesus; this century, once again out of Spain, come the mostly lay, ascetic technocrats of the *Opus Dei*, ready to perform an important transitional role, similar to the one they fulfilled during the last years of Franco's regime.

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However, one should not assume that the Church is ready to surrender the central domains of western Christendom. For reasons that are in some cases diametrically opposed to those that have led Rome to promote the *Opus Dei*, the Catholic Church will have to come to terms with assorted ideologies and intellectual fads. As a combination of the former and the latter, postmodernism[41] may be the only movement that, especially in the advanced industrial world, may now be able to mediate between the Church, a hegemonic purveyor of enchantment, traditionally suspicious of single-minded production and consumption, and capitalism, an equally hegemonic economic system based on the unlimited pursuit of both. In effect, the alleged dismissal of "master narratives", celebrated by this supposedly "anti-totalizing" fad-cum-ideology—for all practical purposes, the rejection of the Church's great enemies, the Enlightenment and Marxism—means that "postmoderns" can now regard with bemused contempt the secularizing impetus of the 18th and 19th centuries; now, the rejection of anti-religious claims allows some of those who have embraced the postmodern dispensation to embrace religion in a suitably ironic manner, but to embrace it nonetheless: from the point of view of a beleaguered Church, religion approached ironically—religion as rhetoric—may be better than no religion at all. Even though devotees of postmodernism may be amused, for instance, by the current Pope's talk about angels, by his devotion to the Virgin Mary, and by his views about sexuality, they will not reject at least the angels out of hand, as the presence of any celestial beings brings into question what postmoderns regard as the naivete of the hegemonic secularization model.

VI

From the late 15th to the late 20th centuries, then, the Catholic compromise in Latin America is but one instance of a process of accommodation that has lasted for almost two millennia. We can safely assume that because of the loss of ground in western Europe, the Catholic compromise will be pursued with renewed vigor in Latin America (and even more so in Africa) for the foreseeable future. We have to ask, however, whether the current compromise with the *saeculum* will succeed. It may indeed be the case that some of the Church's most ingrained habits—especially its attitude towards sexuality and birth control—will contribute to this institution's final retreat into irrelevance. The Catholic Church's opposition to any attempts to limit population growth, quite understandable in the agrarian civilizations in which Christianity was born and flourished, is economically counterproductive in societies whose economies are expected to expand, as excessive population increase neutralizes economic growth. The decrease in the rate of population growth across Latin America seems to signal, *inter alia*, that Catholics are increasingly unwilling to follow traditional Church teachings—a welcome development, since following some of them would have catastrophic consequences.[42] Therefore, whatever compromises the Church may reach in terms of the modernization—or "postmodernization"—of its

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practices, liturgies and even of some of its doctrines, are likely to be compromised by this institution's agrarian roots.

NOTES

[1] On the role of religion in the legitimation of the conquest see Gustavo Benavides, "Religion and Politics in Latin America", in *Movements and Issues in World Religions. A Sourcebook and Analysis of Developments since 1945. Religion, Ideology and Politics*, eds Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, pp.107–142; Benavides, "Millennial Politics in Contemporary Peru", in *Religion and Political Power*, eds G. Benavides and M.W. Daly, Albany, State University of New York, 1989, pp.173–196, 219–232.

[2] See Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1981; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, New York, Knopf, 1989.

[3] Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1991.

[4] On the connection between modernity and the emergence of religion as a realm see G. Benavides, "Modernity", in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago, University of Chicago Press (in press); on the dematerialization and spiritualization of religion see Benavides, "Magic, Religion, Materiality", *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 23, 1997.

[5] This issue is discussed in G. Benavides, "Magic, Religion, Materiality", op. cit. Note 4.

[6] See María Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, *Pachacamac y el Señor de los Milagros*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1992.

[7] For a critique of theories of syncretism and a development of the linguistic parallels see G. Benavides, "Syncretism and Legitimacy in Latin American Religion", in *Enigmatic Powers: Syncretism with African and Indigenous Peoples' Religions among Latinos* [PARAL Series 3], eds Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo and Andrés I. Pérez y Mena, New York, City University of New York, 1995, pp. 19–46.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Jan Szemiński, *La utopía tupamarista*, Lima, Pontificia Universidad Católica, 1983; Szemiński, "Why kill the Spaniard? New perspectives on Andean insurrectionary ideology in the 18th century", in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th centuries*, ed. Steve J. Stern, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, pp. 166–192.

[10] On popular religion see G. Benavides, "Conflict and Accommodation in Latin American Popular Religiosity", in *An Enduring Flame: Studies on Latino Popular Religiosity* [PARAL Series 1], eds Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo and Ana María Díaz-Stevens, City University of New York, 1994, pp. 37–67.

[11] For preliminary remarks on religion, difference and power see G. Benavides, "Religious Articulations of Power", in *Religion and Political Power*, op. cit. Note 1, pp. 1–12, 197–202.

[12] See Pierre Duviols, *La destrucción de las religiones andinas*, Mexico, UNAM, 1977, p. 430 (originally published as *La lutte contre les religions autochtones dans le Pérou colonial. L'extirpation de l'idolatrie entre 532–1660*, Lima, Institut Français d'Etudes Andines, 1971).

[13] This issue is discussed in great detail in J. Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1966 (rev. edn).

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[14] Ibid.; and Hans-Jürgen Prien, *Die Geschichte des Christentums in Lateinamerika*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978; for an overview see G. Benavides, "Religion and Politics in Latin America", op. cit. Note 1.

[15] See Thomas C. Bruneau, *The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1974; and Bruneau, *The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1982.

[16] Benavides, "Religion and Politics in Latin America", op. cit. Note 1, p. 124.

[17] See Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1982, Part IV, "The Prophetic Role of the Church under Authoritarianism", esp. p. 287.

[18] Benavides, "Religion and Politics in Latin America", op. cit. Note 1, p. 124.

[19] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la liberación. Perspectivas*, Lima, CEP, 1971.

[20] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Beber en su propio pozo. En el itinerario espiritual de un pueblo*, Lima, CEP, 1983.

[21] Ibid., p. 13.

[22] Ibid., p. 20.

[23] According to Gutiérrez, *Teología de la liberación*, op. cit. Note 19, p. 375, the point of departure of Liberation Theology is the commitment (*compromiso*) to abolish the current situation of injustice and to the construction of a new society; the Theology of Liberation, therefore, must be realized (*verificada*) in the practice of this *compromiso*.

[24] Gutiérrez, *Beber en su propio pozo*, op. cit. Note 20, p. 203.

[25] See G. Benavides, "The Discourse of Liberation Theology in Perspective", in *The Many Faces of Religion and Society*, eds M. Darrol Bryant and Rita H. Mataragnon, New York, Paragon, 1985, pp. 122–134.

[26] See Luis Peirano, "Entrevista con Gustavo Gutiérrez", *Quehacer*, March 1980, pp. 110–111; see also *La fuerza histórica de los pobres*, Lima, CEP, 1979, p. 260, a book in which Gutiérrez discusses this issue in the context of the "Puebla Document". For an earlier discussion of these issues see Benavides, op. cit. Note 25, p. 32.

[27] On divine anthropomorphism see G. Benavides, "Cognitive and Ideological Aspects of Divine Anthropomorphism", *Religion* 25, 1995, pp. 9–22.

[28] See Rudolg Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* [1917], München, Beck, 1963, p. 6.

[29] See G. Benavides, op. cit. Note 25, p. 128.

[30] See Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1978.

[31] See David Martin, *Tongues of Fire. The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

[32] Without forgetting that the roots of this process go back to the high Middle Ages, if not to Roman times; see Benavides, "Modernity", op. cit. Note 4.

[33] Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1987, p. 99.

[34] See, among many other studies, James B. Greenberg, *Santiago's Sword. Chatino Peasant Religion and Economics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981.

[35] This was already recognized by David Martin in *A General Theory of Secularization*, New York, Harper & Row, 1978. See also G. Benavides, "Religion and the Modernization of Tradition in Latin America", in *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues. An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments since 1945*, eds Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler, New York, Greenwood Press, 1989, pp. 177–196.

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[36] See H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change", in *The European Witchcraze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays*, New York, Harper & Row, 1969, p. 35.

[37] On this issue see Trevor-Roper (op. cit. Note 36) and Wolfgang Reinhard, "Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68, 1977, pp. 226–252.

[38] Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei. An Investigation into the Secret Society Struggling for Power within the Roman Catholic Church*, San Francisco, Harper, 1992, p. 107.

[39] Ibid., p. 108.

[40] This does not mean that Christianity will cease to play a role in Europe. It is enough to think of the break-up of Yugoslavia along ethnic-religious lines, or the possible uses of Christian symbols against Muslim immigrants in France and elsewhere. It can be assumed, however, that, except in crisis situations, Christianity will cease to play a legitimizing role in the prosperous societies of western Europe.

[41] For an overall critique of postmodernism see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989. For a critique from a cognitive perspective see G. Benavides, "Postmodern Disseminations and Cognitive Constraints", *Religion* 27, 1997, pp. 129–138.

[42] One would hope that the expansion of the influence of the Catholic Church in sub-Saharan Africa will not exacerbate the problems of the region.

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